

## United States Senate

May 18, 2020

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Chairman  
U.S. Senate Homeland Security and  
Governmental Affairs Committee  
340 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Johnson:

It has now been over two months since our committee's last hearing with administration officials responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and two years since we have had an oversight hearing with the Administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Rather than prioritize providing important oversight that will protect Americans from the unprecedented threat posed by this pandemic, you have continued to pursue partisan political matters—such as the markup scheduled for this Wednesday on the issuance of a subpoena—that do nothing to help the millions of constituents that we serve. This is a clear abdication of responsibility. That is why on March 16<sup>th</sup> I wrote you a letter requesting a hearing, and now nine weeks later, I am reiterating that request. It is imperative that we get a hearing on the schedule and that it is the first in a line of COVID-19 oversight hearings with administration officials.

Since our last hearing with administration officials, the number of reported coronavirus cases in the United States has grown from about 200 cases to 1.5 million and the death count in this country has gone from the low double digits to almost 100,000. There is nothing more important for our committee to consider than this pandemic that is killing thousands of people in this country each week.

This crisis deserves our undivided attention and it is critical that we hear from the officials who are currently responsible for addressing this outbreak as soon as possible. Failing to convene a hearing with these individuals is a failure to preform our oversight function especially considering that a primary role of this committee is to provide

oversight of FEMA, the agency tasked with coordinating our nation's response to this global health crisis.

Congress has recognized the important role that it must play in our nation's response to this economic and public health crisis and its eventual recovery. We have passed four coronavirus relief bills, providing nearly \$3 trillion for our nation's families, health care providers, small businesses, and state and local governments. While the passage of these pieces of legislation provided much needed relief to some, we have seen that is not nearly enough. Additionally, the rollout of these bills has been riddled with challenges and a lack of transparency.

For example, nurses, doctors, and other frontline workers are risking their lives every day to help others and keep our country running, yet have struggled to get the basic personal protective equipment (PPE) that they need; The one-time checks to families are insufficient and were delayed by weeks; Minority-owned small businesses have been virtually shut out of the Paycheck Protection Program; And we still do not have the testing capacity across the country to safely get America back to work.

It is our duty to the American people to understand what is going wrong and what is needed going forward in order to get through this crisis in the most efficient and productive way possible. In order to do this, we must hear from and question top administration officials. Any suggestion that this is not possible or not a priority for these officials at this time is unacceptable.

At our roundtable on May 6<sup>th</sup>, you indicated that you were having calls with FEMA Administrator Gaynor as the Chairman of this committee. It is my understanding that the content of those calls were not public. I have also had private conversations with Administrator Gaynor and other key administration officials and will continue to do so. However, there is no substitute for public hearings with witnesses under oath. As the committee designated with oversight, it is incumbent on us to conduct public hearings. This starts by hearing from Administrator Gaynor alongside other key administration officials handling the nation's response to COVID-19, as soon as possible.

In the last eight weeks, I have sent six letters to FEMA in an effort to get answers about how the agency is coordinating the response to this crisis and have yet to receive a single response. In these letters, I have demanded answers on how the agency is making decisions about where to send scarce resources. I have requested detailed plans for responding to natural disasters during a pandemic. I have called on the agency to address its history of racial and socioeconomic disparities in disaster response. I have called for—and since reiterated my call for—national guidelines for an accurate and consistent COVID-19 death count. And I have asked for information on how FEMA is distributing COVID-19 treatments.

As the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, we have a responsibility to conduct oversight hearings with top administration officials, immediately. I hope that this request and my concerns will not continue to go ignored, and I look forward to working with you to ensure that we are upholding our duty to the millions of Americans who are relying on this committee to do its job.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Kamala D. Harris", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Kamala D. Harris  
United States Senator